

Committee on Resources

Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans

Statement

Testimony

of

KEN REININGER

CURATOR OF BIRDS

NORTH CAROLINA ZOOLOGICAL PARK

ASHEBORO, NORTH CAROLINA

before the

SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE

AND OCEANS

COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

on

H.R 39

THE NEOTROPICAL MIGRATORY BIRD CONSERVATION ACT

11 FEBRUARY 1999

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of H.R. 39, the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Act. My name is Ken Reininger. I am the Curator of Birds for the North Carolina Zoological Park in Asheboro, North Carolina, an accredited member of the American Zoo and Aquarium Association (AZA) since 1974. The AZA represents 183 accredited zoos, aquariums, oceanariums, and wild animal parks in North America, as well as most of their professional employees.

I have a total of twenty-four years of experience as an aviculturist and avian collection manager in a public zoological park setting, including six years as the bird curator at the North Carolina Zoo. I have participated in a number of bird recovery programs, including the Hawaiian Nene Goose, wattled crane, and Bali mynah,

and have worked on field programs from North Carolina to South Africa. I also serve on a number of AZA scientific and advisory committees.

Renowned as the first American zoo designed and built from its inception around the natural habitat philosophy, animals at the North Carolina Zoo wander through large indoor and outdoor habitat that stimulate their wild environments. The mission of the North Carolina Zoo is to encourage understanding of and commitment to the conservation of the world's wildlife and wild places through the recognition of the interdependence of people and nature. We believe the sustainable use of natural resources is a vital concern for humans as well as wildlife. We are proud of our efforts to give our visitors information they can use to make wise choices about the use and management of natural resources.

Included in the zoo's collection is the R.J. Reynolds Forest Aviary, a miniature tropical forest with 100 rainbow-colored exotic birds. Opened in 1982, it was selected by USA TODAY as one of the 10 best exhibits in American zoos. It was also the zoo's first indoor exhibit. The zoo is very proud of its tradition of excellence in the conservation of threatened and endangered bird species.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to take this opportunity to thank you, Congressman Miller, and Chairman Young for reintroducing H.R. 39, and for conducting this hearing so early in the session. I also thank the Chairman for making some of the recommended changes offered by the Administration in 1998.

As you are well aware, one of the greatest threats to many species is habitat loss and degradation. One of the more successful practices to reduce these pressures has been to encourage habitat conservation in the form of public-private partnerships (e.g. the African and Asian Elephant and Rhino and Tiger Conservation Acts). I believe H.R. 39 will continue this relatively new formula of success, and at the same time, complement existing conservation programs and initiatives, such as Partners in Flight and the North American Waterfowl Management Plan.

Although migratory birds are protected by the Migratory Bird Treaty Act (the United States is a party to four bilateral treaties, one each with Great Britain (on behalf of Canada), Mexico, Russia, and Japan), a number of migratory songbird species continue to face increasing challenges throughout North America. These species face challenges from forest fragmentation, the loss of habitat on wintering areas and the loss of habitat at key migration stopover sites. I know from personal experience the importance of these key areas such as the Outer Banks of North Carolina to birds making the long migratory journey.

Moreover, over 90 North American bird species are listed as endangered or threatened under the Endangered Species Act while another 124 species are currently listed on the list of Migratory Nongame Birds of Management Concern. Should many of these birds maintain their historic migratory routes, their next stop will most likely be to the list of endangered and threatened species. Their important wintering and feeding grounds are simply under attack. While Mexico lists some 390 bird species as vulnerable or endangered, much more is needed. There needs to be a commitment from many at both ends of the migratory route, from the wintering grounds in the more tropical regions to the cooler northern breeding habitats and all the critical habitat in between to conserve these species. Preserving habitat for neotropical migratory birds is truly a team effort. We cannot allow continued fragmentation of habitat to continue.

I know and understand the importance of community involvement and the value of partnerships and education outreach for a wildlife conservation program to be successful. Whether it is balancing the needs of the bald eagles with logging interests, land developers and power companies as done in the Yadkin PeeDee Lakes region of Central North Carolina, or involving South African trout farmers in wetlands and

wattled crane preservation, I have learned the value of insuring that all stakeholders are brought into the problem solving process.

I believe H.R. 39 is a step in the right direction. The legislation and its subsequent Fund create a cooperative atmosphere and the foundation for a win-win situation for neotropical migratory birds and their important migratory habitat, our international partners in conservation, and the millions of Americans who spend an increasingly amount of time bird watching and on bird-related activities. H.R. 39 continues the innovative cost-sharing formulas from earlier conservation measures utilizing both federal and non-federal support. Most of all, by establishing the Neotropical Migratory Bird Conservation Fund, the United States elevates the importance of protecting critical migratory bird habitat in Latin America, the Caribbean and throughout the Americas. Moreover, from a biologic perspective, H.R. 39 will help to ensure that the ecosystems, which neotropical birds and humans depend on, are managed in a more sustainable way.

In conclusion, H.R. 39 represents the best in conservation legislation - a targeted strategy to protect critical habitat and biodiversity, a proven formula to foster public-private partnerships through a competitive grant process, and a program that complements existing national and international programs.

As John Rogers, Deputy Director for FWS stated last year in his testimony before the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works, "The nature of this 'shared trust' resource makes migratory bird management a true international challenge."

Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today. Mr. Chairman, I will be happy to answer any questions from the Committee.

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